

# IDIOMS

Complete  
Edition

## English Vocabulary

2022

- Idioms
- Phrases
- Sayings
- Proverbs
- Expressions

Premier English Learning Publishing

English Idioms Vocabulary 2022 Complete Edition  
Important English Idioms, Sayings, and Phrases You  
Should Know to Write and Speak Like a Well-  
Educated Native Speaker

by Premier English Learning Publishing

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For any inquiries:

[premierenglishpublishing@gmail.com](mailto:premierenglishpublishing@gmail.com)

## **From Publisher**

In this book, we've collected smart English idioms, sayings, and phrases you should know to write and speak like a well-educated native speaker.

This dictionary contains only the most important idioms with clear and simple definitions and up-to-date example sentences.

Study at home, on the road, or in class; bookmark pages; and remember that repetition is the key to memory.

# Vocabulary

## **A good many**

Meaning: A lot of.

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: Did anyone enter the building while you were talking?

Speaker B: A good many people I should think.

## **All hands on deck**

Meaning: The phrase is said when there is some kind of emergency, and it requires everyone to work hard; something that takes a lot of effort.

Example: It's been a bit of an all hands on deck effort organizing this meeting.

## **All hell broke loose**

Meaning: A situation that suddenly gets out of control and people start fighting or arguing.

Example: When a fan at a rock concert jumped onto the stage, all hell broke loose.

## **All walks of life**

Meaning: People of all social and economic classes.

Example: In the 19th century, this game was played by all walks of life.

## **A mile a minute**

Meaning: Extremely fast; very rapidly.

Example: My friend talks a mile a minute about his cars.

### **An awful lot**

Meaning: A large amount; very much.

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: Our friend is completely devastated by the death of his parents.  
What can we do about it?

Speaker B: Not an awful lot, unfortunately.

### **Any port in a storm**

Meaning: To emphasize that in a bad situation you will accept any help or take advantage of any opportunity.

Example: Thanks, Dan! It's not an ideal solution, but hey, any port in a storm.

### **Article of faith**

Meaning: Something you deeply believe in.

Example: This book is an article of faith for her.

### **As broad as it's long**

Meaning: With no significant difference; without any advantage; the same.

Example: Hotel A is a little cheaper, but Hotel B has free breakfast, so it's as broad as it's long.

### **As drunk as a lord**

Meaning: Extremely drunk.

Example: He was as drunk as a lord.

### **As good a place as any**

Meaning: Not perfect, but not worse than any other.

Example: This hotel is as good a place as any to spend the night; It was just as good a place as any to spend the weekend.

### **As keen as mustard**

Meaning: Extremely excited, interested, or enthusiastic.

Example: John got a job at a big company because he was as keen as mustard.

### **As long as one's arm**

Meaning: Extremely long.

Example: My wife owes money to a list of people as long as my arm.

### **At a low ebb**

Meaning: In a state of weakness.

Example: Our economy is at a low ebb; Her health is at a low ebb; My business is now at a low ebb.

### **At long last**

Meaning: Finally; after a long wait.

Example: At long last pizza has arrived; At long last the project was finished.

### **A torrid time**

Meaning: A difficult period filled with problems and challenges.

Example: Our team will definitely face a torrid time in tomorrow's game; I had a torrid time during the championship.

**At your earliest convenience**

Meaning: As soon as possible.

Example: Please reply to my letter at your earliest convenience.

**Avoid something like the plague**

Meaning: To avoid something as much as possible.

Example: Rita's been avoiding me like the plague ever since I confessed my love for her.

**Back the wrong horse**

Meaning: To support something unsuccessful; make the wrong choice or decision.

Example: You really backed the wrong horse when you bought this abandoned house; Despite their vast experience, investors sometimes end up backing the wrong horse.

**Barking up the wrong tree**

Meaning: Follow the wrong course of action; doing something that will not produce the result you want.

Example: If you expect me to solve all your financial problems, then you, my dear friends, are barking up the wrong tree.

**Batten down the hatches**

Meaning: To prepare for a difficult or unpleasant situation.

Example: Many companies are battening down the hatches before the crisis.

**Be a barrel of fun**

Meaning: Be very cheerful, sociable, and enjoyable.



Example: My friend Joe is a real barrel of fun; Festivals are always a barrel of fun.

### **Be at a loose end**

Meaning: Not knowing what to do; have nothing to do.

Example: You can come and help me clean up if you're at a loose end; Get out and take a walk if you're at a loose end.

### **Beat someone hollow**

Meaning: To defeat someone easily and thoroughly.

Example: We scored an incredible 130 points per game and beat that team hollow.

### **Be beside yourself**

Meaning: Being overwhelmed by strong feelings or emotions; unable to think clearly or control oneself.

Example: Tanya was beside herself with grief when her husband died; John was beside himself with excitement.

### **Be chasing your own tail**

Meaning: To do something extremely inefficient or unproductive.

Example: I need to start taking only effective steps towards my goal and stop chasing my own tail.

### **Bee's knees**

Meaning: Excellent; of a very high standard; ideal.

Example: Ron thinks he's the bee's knees; This TV show is the bee's knees; Christmas dinner was just the bee's knees.

### **Be for the high jump**

Meaning: Prepare to be punished; to warn someone that you will punish them if they do something wrong/illegal.

Example: If I catch you stealing, you'll be for the high jump.

### **Before your very eyes**

Meaning: Right in front you; while you are watching.

Example: Thank you for coming to see our magic show! Before your very eyes, I will make this ball disappear.

### **Beggar belief (or “beggar description”)**

Meaning: Impossible or not worth believing; impossible to describe or explain.

Example: It almost beggars belief that you completed the project on your own, without any help; Her beauty beggars description!

### **Be in a tight corner**

Meaning: To be in a difficult or tough situation.

Example: With funding being cut, my science project is in a tight corner.

### **Be in deep water**

Meaning: To get into serious trouble.

Example: Having lost all his savings in the casino, he is now in deep water; Sarah has been in deep water since she lost her job.

### **Be in over your head**

Meaning: To be involved in a difficult, dangerous, or unpleasant situation that you cannot handle due to lack of strength, knowledge, or experience.

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: I can beat them all, I have enough resources.

Speaker B: No, you can't! You are in over your head and you know it.

### **Be in the soup**

Meaning: To be in serious trouble.

Example: If Tony and his wife find out what you've done, you'll be in the soup.

### **Belt and braces**

Meaning: Do some extra actions to make sure something is safe; providing double security.

Example: I have a very important meeting tomorrow, so I set an alarm on my phone, tablet, and watch - belt and braces, I admit.

### **Be on the best of terms with someone** (or “be on good terms”)

Meaning: To have a good/excellent relationship with someone.

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: Do you think Dan will agree to hire me?

Speaker B: I'm not on the best of terms with Dan at the moment, so you'll have to ask him yourself.

### **Be on tenterhooks**

Meaning: Very nervous, excited, and thrilled because you are wondering what is going to happen in a specific situation.

Example: We were on tenterhooks all evening waiting for the big news; I've been on tenterhooks all month, waiting for the DNA test results.

### **Be on the cusp of**

Meaning: To be at the time when a situation/condition is going to change.

Example: We're on the very cusp of the new world.

**Be on the skids**

Meaning: To be in a difficult or bad situation.

Example: Their family business seems to be on the skids.

**Between the devil and the deep blue sea**

Meaning: In a bad situation with two equally unpleasant options.

Example: With all my debts, I'm really between the devil and the deep blue sea, because I need to sell either my house or business.

**Blot on something**

Meaning: A fault or mistake that ruins someone's reputation; something that spoils something.

Example: A serious blot on my career; This incident is a blot on our family name.

**Blow something or someone out of the water**

Meaning: Completely destroy, ruin, or defeat someone/something.

Example: These terrible reviews from the critics will blow my restaurant out of the water.

**Bone of contention**

Meaning: Something that people argue about; subject of a disagreement.

Example: The main bone of contention between us is money.

**Bring something to the table**

Meaning: To contribute; to provide something useful to others in your group; bring up for discussion.

Example: Our new worker will bring many important skills to the table; So, John, what are you going to bring to the table besides your vast experience?

### **Burn the midnight oil**

Meaning: To work/read/study late into the night.

Example: I have to burn the midnight oil to finish my homework.

### **Bursting at the seams**

Meaning: Extremely full or crowded.

Example: When the whole family comes home for Christmas, our house is bursting at the seams.

### **Burst someone's bubble**

Meaning: To end someone's illusions, dreams, beliefs, or hopes by telling them the truth.

Example: I don't want to burst your bubble, but she's gone and won't come back to you.

### **By jove**

Meaning: To emphasize that you are very surprised or excited.

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: Thank you for your testimony, sir. But before we let you go, there's one more thing I need to do.

Speaker B: What exactly?

Speaker A: I will take your fingerprints and a hair sample.

Speaker B: Will you, by jove? Well, get on with it then!

**By leaps and bounds**

Meaning: Extremely fast.

Example: His English is improving by leaps and bounds; Her admiration for him was growing by leaps and bounds.

**By the look of things/it**

Meaning: Based on the information you have at the moment.

Example: By the look of things, he did not commit a crime; Prices are going to go up, by the look of it.

**Call a spade a spade**

Meaning: Speak directly and clearly about something, even if it is unpleasant.

Example: Let's call a spade a spade - you cheated on me with my best friend!

**Cannot do something for toffee**

Meaning: Be very incompetent and extremely bad at something.

Example: I can't drive a truck for toffee; I can't sing for toffee.

**Can't make head nor tail of something**

Meaning: Can't understand something at all.

Example: I couldn't make head nor tail of that old book.

**Carved in stone**

Meaning: Cannot be changed; permanent.

Example: You can pitch us your ideas about our product, we haven't carved anything in stone yet.

### **Cast a shadow over/on**

Meaning: To make a situation less encouraging, enjoyable, or hopeful and more unpleasant.

Example: The sad news about his health condition cast a shadow over our meeting.

### **Catch someone red-handed**

Meaning: To discover (or catch) someone in the act of committing a crime or doing something bad or illegal.

Example: Finn was caught red-handed in a robbery; The police caught her red-handed with stolen diamonds in her purse.

### **Cat got your tongue?**

Meaning: To emphasize that someone is unusually quiet.

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: You have lipstick marks on your neck. Who is she?

Speaker B: Ohhh.

Speaker A: What's the matter? Cat got your tongue?

### **Champagne tastes, beer wages** (or “champagne taste on a beer budget”)

Meaning: Someone with expensive preferences and low income.

Example: Tina spent her entire salary on a designer jacket, she definitely has champagne taste on a beer budget.

### **Clip someone's wings**

Meaning: To limit someone's power, freedom, or comfort.

Example: Her parents clipped her wings by refusing to pay for her luxurious life.

### **Close the door/stable door after the horse has bolted**

Meaning: To emphasize that it is too late to take action to prevent something undesirable/unwanted from happening, because it has already happened.

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: Hello sir! We would like to offer you a free alarm system for your store.

Speaker B: Thanks for the offer, but I've already been robbed, so it's a bit late to close the door after the horse has bolted.

### **Come a cropper**

Meaning: To fail badly; to fall down.

Example: Investors have come a cropper on this project; Dan came a cropper on the ski slopes and broke his arm.

### **Come from behind**

Meaning: To win unexpectedly while in a losing position.

Example: The red team came from behind to beat the green team 6-5.

### **Cook someone's goose**

Meaning: To ruin someone's plans; prevent success.

Example: This front-page scandal news will surely cook his goose.

### **Cook the books**

Meaning: To falsify a company's financial records.



Example: He made thousands from cooking the books before the fraud department caught him.

### **Couldn't fight their way out of a paper bag**

Meaning: Weak or ineffective; without much energy or ability.

Example: He's absolutely useless as an ally - he couldn't fight his way out of a paper bag!

### **Counsel of despair**

Meaning: An admission of defeat or failure.

Example: It is sad to hear such a counsel of despair from our government about the situation with our economy.

### **Crawl out of the woodwork**

Meaning: To suddenly or unexpectedly appear after a long time (usually for selfish purposes).

Example: After his song became a number one hit, his ex-girlfriend came crawling out of the woodwork.

### **Cry for the moon**

Meaning: To wish for something unattainable.

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: I do not have time for anything. I wish there were at least 40 hours in a day.

Speaker B: Well, you're crying for the moon!

### **Cute as a button**

Meaning: Adorable; graceful; very cute.

Example: Your little sister is cute as a button.

**Cut short**

Meaning: To end something earlier than expected or planned.

Example: He was a promising surgeon, but his career was cut short by a terrible accident with his left hand.

**Cut something to the bone**

Meaning: To cut down severely; reduce to the bare minimum.

Example: We need to cut our expenses to the bone.

**Die in vain**

Meaning: To die for nothing; to sacrifice yourself for a cause that ends up being useless.

Example: Commander, you need to retreat! Don't let your warriors die in vain.

**Dig one's heels in**

Meaning: To emphasize that you do not want to change your plans; to refuse to do something.

Example: I tried to persuade her to choose another restaurant, but she dug her heels in.

**Discretion is the better part of valour**

Meaning: To emphasize that it is better to avoid unnecessary risks or unpleasant situations.

Example: Danny, my boy, discretion is the better part of valour, so don't be a hero and go home!

**Dock someone's wages**

Meaning: To reduce the amount of money you pay someone as a penalty/punishment.

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: Boss, John delivered the package, but it's damaged. Should I accept it and pay him?

Speaker B: Fine, but dock his wages.

### **Don't give up the day job**

Meaning: Make it clear to someone that you do not believe in the success of their new idea, plan, project, or hobby (in a playful and non-offensive manner).

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: What do you think of my new book idea?

Speaker B: Hmm, interesting idea, but don't give up the day job.

### **Do someone a world of good**

Meaning: To make someone feel better or much healthier; to be very helpful for someone.

Example: The mountain air will do you a world of good.

### **Down in the dumps**

Meaning: Extremely sad; unhappy; very depressed.

Example: Vince has been down in the dumps ever since his wife died.

### **Dress in layers**

Meaning: Dress warmly; wear several types of clothing at once to keep warm.

Example: You're going to Norway, so dress in layers.

**Drop a clanger**

Meaning: To say or do something foolish or embarrassing.

Example: I dropped a clanger when I asked him about the wedding on our first date.

**Easy on the eye/ear**

Meaning: Pleasant to look at or listen to.

Example: I painted my bedroom in pastel colours to make it easy on the eye; I like classical music because it's easy on the ear.

**Eat someone out of house and home**

Meaning: To eat a lot of someone's food, especially when you're a guest in their house (often said in a humorous manner).

Example: Aunt Lucy, Uncle John, I didn't invite you here to eat me out of house and home.

**Educated guess**

Meaning: An assumption based on knowledge of the situation and therefore most likely correct.

Example: As a mechanic, I can't say exactly how much it will cost to repair your car, but I can make an educated guess.

**Every dog has its day**

Meaning: Everyone has at least one happy or successful moment in life.

Example: Your startup has failed, but don't lose hope and remember that every dog has its day.

**Fall by the wayside**

Meaning: To fail to finish an activity; no longer be effective.

Example: Many clubs and resorts fall by the wayside during a recession.

### **Fall into the wrong hands**

Meaning: To be discovered by your enemy; to be discovered by unfriendly/dangerous people.

Example: If this document falls into the wrong hands, then it could be catastrophic.

### **Fat chance**

Meaning: Not likely to happen; extremely unlikely.

Example: Let's face it, you have a fat chance of getting the job; Fat chance we can get there on time.

### **Faux pas**

Meaning: A social mistake; embarrassing error; something socially awkward.

Example: Arriving at the party early or on time is a faux pas.

### **Fit to drop**

Meaning: Very tired.

Example: After the marathon we were fit to drop.

### **Flatter to deceive**

Meaning: Looks promising at first glance, but ends up being very disappointing.

Example: As with most new investment companies, their early success flattered to deceive.

### **Flog/beat a dead horse**

Meaning: To keep wasting energy or time on something when there is no chance of success.

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: Stop asking me these questions, I won't tell you anyway.

Speaker B: But I need answers. Tell me everything you know!

Speaker A: You do like flogging a dead horse, don't you?

### **Fly off the handle**

Meaning: To become very angry; to lose control; react too angrily to something insignificant.

Example: I'm sorry I unintentionally pushed your girlfriend, but there's no need to fly off the handle.

### **For donkey's years**

Meaning: For a very long time.

Example: I've had this ring for donkey's years; The new railway won't be ready for donkey's years.

### **For want of a better word/term**

Meaning: Lacking a more precise word/term; to emphasize that you cannot think of a more accurate way of explaining what you mean.

Example: He is, for want of a better word, a grumbler; She should behave more respectfully or, for want of a better word, decently.

### **Friends in high places**

Meaning: Influential and powerful people who will help you in case of emergency.

Example: I have plenty of friends in high places, so finding a new job is not a problem.

### **Get a grip on yourself**

Meaning: To make an effort to control your behaviour, manners, or emotions.

Example: Get a grip on yourself and stop crying!

### **Get your hands on someone**

Meaning: To catch or find someone.

Example: When I get my hands on him, he will have to pay off his debts.

### **Give someone the runaround**

Meaning: To delay someone by providing useless information or directions.

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: When do you plan to launch the project?

Speaker B: On Monday or Wednesday. Maybe Saturday. Or maybe a week from now.

Speaker A: Sounds like you're giving me the runaround. I need to know exactly when this project will be launched!

### **Go at it hammer and tongs**

Meaning: With great energy, power, passion, or enthusiasm; very intensively; to have a very noisy argument.

Example: Our neighbors were going at it hammer and tongs all night.

### **Go down like a lead balloon**

Meaning: To be extremely unsuccessful, unloved, or unpopular.

Example: His political joke went down like a lead balloon; These stupid questions go down like a lead balloon.

### **Go down like ninepins**

Meaning: To be damaged in large numbers; when a lot of people suddenly become ill.

Example: Trees and road signs were going down like ninepins in a storm.

### **Go easy on someone**

Meaning: To treat someone more gently, less harshly.

Example: Go easy on your son, he's just a kid.

### **Go off-book**

Meaning: To not follow the script; disturb the order of things.

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: I have an idea! Let's take half of Mike's share for ourselves.

Speaker B: I have a better idea! Let's split the money between the three of us and leave Mike aside.

Speaker C: Stop arguing! Let's stick to the plan. I don't like it when you two go off-book like this.

### **Go off the rails**

Meaning: Start behaving in an uncontrollable or intolerable way.

Example: My daughter started going off the rails shortly after graduation.

### **Go the extra mile**

Meaning: To make an extra effort; do more than is expected of you.

Example: We need to go the extra mile to release the game on time.

### **Go through the floor**



Meaning: To fall to an ultra-low level.

Example: Due to the crisis, resort prices have gone through the floor.

### **Guard your tongue**

Meaning: Being very careful about what you say.

Example: Guard your tongue, woman, you're talking about my mother!

### **Hang in the balance**

Meaning: Not yet decided; unsure of the future; not certain what will happen to it.

Example: After that scandal, the future of my company still hangs in the balance.

### **Have a bone to pick with someone**

Meaning: To talk to the person about the things that annoy you; to have an issue to discuss or argue about.

Example: Darling, I've got a bone to pick with you. Why did you decide to have dinner with your ex-boyfriend again?

### **Have a bee in your bonnet**

Meaning: To talk a lot about something or be extremely passionate about it (mostly in a very annoying way).

Example: He's got a bee in his bonnet about video games.

### **Have another string to one's bow**

Meaning: To emphasize that you have another plan/idea/skill to use if it's needed.

Example: You're right, my plan didn't work, but I have another string to my bow.

**Have a short fuse**

Meaning: To get angry/mad very easily.

Example: Her boss is known to have a short fuse.

**Have bigger fish to fry**

Meaning: Have more important things to do.

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: Could you help me with my project?

Speaker B: Sorry, I've got bigger fish to fry!

**Have feet of clay**

Meaning: To have hidden flaws or weaknesses.

Example: Most of the greatest minds in history had feet of clay; Fans don't want to see their idols with feet of clay.

**Have it in you**

Meaning: To have a certain quality/skill.

Example: You don't have it in you to make the difficult choices.

**Have one's blood up**

Meaning: To be angry or inflamed; to be in an aggressive or violent mood.

Example: Her offensive jokes really got my blood up.

**Have the stomach for something**

Meaning: To have enough determination to do something difficult, risky, or unpleasant.

Example: I don't have the stomach for a real fight; I have no stomach for horror movies.

### **Have your back to the wall**

Meaning: Find yourself in an extremely difficult situation with limited options for action.

Example: He really has his back to the wall because of all his debts and loans.

### **Have your fair share of something**

Meaning: A lot or more than enough of something.

Example: Listen to me Jonny, I've done my fair share of travelling and I'm telling you the most delicious desserts can be found in Norway; He's had his fair share of failures in his life.

### **Hold sway**

Meaning: To have a great influence on someone's opinion or behaviour; to control someone/something.

Example: His warriors hold sway over much of the continent; Traditional values still hold sway in our home.

### **Hot on the trail of**

Meaning: Close to catching someone; close to finding something.

Example: A detective is hot on the trail of a murder; Recruiters are hot on the trail of young soccer stars.

### **Hot under the collar**

Meaning: Extremely angry or embarrassed.

Example: I got really hot under the collar when my ex-girlfriend showed up at the party.

### **If all else fails**

Meaning: If all other attempts have failed; if what was planned cannot happen.

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: You look gorgeous! You've always been so stylish and unique in your outfits.

Speaker B: Thanks! If all else fails, I can get into the fashion business.

### **In a bind**

Meaning: To be in a difficult, tough, or threatening situation.

Example: I'm in a bind to pay my bills; This new schedule has put me in a bind.

### **In a stew**

Meaning: Worried; confused; upset.

Example: Jennifer is all in a stew over her lost mobile phone.

### **In cold blood**

Meaning: In an unemotional way; in a cruel and calm way.

Example: She shot him in cold blood.

### **In fits and starts**

Meaning: Not stable; not smooth; often stops and then starts again.

Example: The music player works in fits and starts.

**In full swing**

Meaning: At the peak of activity.

Example: When my girlfriend and I arrived, the party was in full swing.

**In one piece**

Meaning: Unscathed; without being damaged.

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: Ouch, an icicle just fell on me.

Speaker B: You in one piece?

Speaker A: And still breathing, thanks.

**In someone's bad books**

Meaning: In someone's disfavour.

Example: I'm in her bad books at the moment because I forgot to buy her a birthday present.

**In store for someone**

Meaning: Forthcoming; about to happen to someone; planned for someone.

Example: I have a big surprise in store for you.

**In the fullness of time**

Meaning: Eventually; after a long time.

Example: I'm sure she'll forgive me everything in the fullness of time; All her secrets will be revealed in the fullness of time.

**In words of one syllable**

Meaning: In clear and simple language without complicated words and expressions.

Example: Please explain this theorem to me in words of one syllable;  
Could you repeat your speech in words of one syllable?

### **Itching to do something**

Meaning: Being extremely impatient because you want to do/get something as soon as possible.

Example: She's itching to go to college; He's itching to get back to work.

### **It's high time**

Meaning: To emphasize that it's time to do what should have been done a long time ago.

Example: It's high time you realize that you're a father; It's high time you got a job.

### **It's no skin off my nose**

Meaning: To emphasize that you don't care if someone does something, because it's not your responsibility.

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: They will stop working with us if we do not fulfil all the terms of the contract.

Speaker B: It's no skin off my nose, I'm just a trainee in this company.

### **Jog someone's memory**

Meaning: To refresh someone's memory; to help someone remember something.

Example: His old diary jogged his memory; That family photo jogged my memory.

### **Jumping-off point**

Meaning: A starting point for an activity, journey, or project.

Example: Amsterdam is the best jumping-off point for a trip to the Netherlands.

### **Jumping on shadows**

Meaning: Being intensely frightened by things that shouldn't normally frighten you.

Example: Ever since she returned from the expedition, she's been acting strangely - jumping on shadows, constantly checking if the front door is closed.

### **Keep a low profile** (or “keep the spotlight off”)

Meaning: To avoid attracting attention.

Example: I hope you will try to keep a low profile tonight. Don't forget that the police are looking for you.

### **Keep one's chin up**

Meaning: To stay cheerful during difficult or challenging times.

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: Don't worry so much about bad test results, you'll retake them in a month and get the highest possible score. I believe in you!

Speaker B: I'll try my best to keep my chin up, thanks dad.

### **Keep one's nose to the grindstone**

Meaning: To do intensive, heavy, or continuous work.

Example: Dina's got to keep her nose to the grindstone to feed her family.

**Keep one's powder dry**

Meaning: To remain calm and be fully prepared for a particular situation/event.

Example: Conflict may not arise, but there is no harm in keeping your powder dry.

**Keep one's eyes peeled**

Meaning: To watch very carefully.

Example: Just drive slowly and keep your eyes peeled.

**Keep one's hair on**

Meaning: To urge someone not to panic and stay calm.

Example: Keep your hair on, we're almost there!

**Keep tabs on**

Meaning: To watch someone/something carefully; always know where someone/something is.

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: Where is Jimmy?

Speaker B: How should I know? I don't keep tabs on him.

**Kill or cure**

Meaning: Either success or total failure.

Example: This project will be kill or cure for our company; This discovery will kill or cure our research.

**Know something by heart**

Meaning: To memorize something completely.



Example: I'm pretty sure I know this song by heart.

### **Labour the point**

Meaning: Keep talking or pitching your idea/plan in a boring or annoying manner.

Example: I don't want to labour the point, but you should know that my project is much better.

### **Lead someone a merry dance**

Meaning: To treat someone unfairly or badly over period of time; to cause a lot of problems.

Example: She led me a merry dance before I finally got her to sign the divorce papers.

### **Lead someone down the garden path**

Meaning: To mislead; cheat; deceive.

Example: Vince may have led me down the garden path with that investment opportunity.

### **Leap in the dark**

Meaning: An action performed without the certainty of what will happen as a result.

Example: It would be a leap in the dark to start a company without testing your product; My move to Europe was a leap in the dark.

### **Leave in the lurch**

Meaning: To leave/abandon someone at a time when they really need your assistance or support.

Example: My colleagues left me in the lurch and I had to finish the report myself.

### **Leave no stone unturned**

Meaning: To do everything you can to find something.

Example: Ginny left no stone unturned in her search for her real parents.

### **Lend an ear**

Meaning: To listen to someone in a friendly and sympathetic manner.

Example: Could you please lend me your ear for a minute? I have a confession to make; My friends are always ready to lend an ear to me.

### **Lie low**

Meaning: To remain hidden; to try not to be seen or noticed.

Example: After the last fraud, the scammers decided to lie low for a while.

### **Load the dice against someone**

Meaning: To put someone at a disadvantage.

Example: Lack of experience loaded the dice against Sarrah as a candidate for the position.

### **Long shot**

Meaning: With very little chance of success.

Example: It's a long shot, but I still want to try to get the job.

### **Loosen someone's tongue**

Meaning: To make someone speak more openly or freely.

Example: The beer had loosened John's tongue.

**Lose one's bottle**

Meaning: To lose one's nerve or courage in a stressful situation.

Example: I wanted to fight him back, but I lost my bottle at the last minute.

**Magic touch**

Meaning: The ability to do something extremely well.

Example: He has a magic touch in the kitchen; Dan seems to have a magic touch with cars.

**Make a meal of something** (or “make a big deal of something”)

Meaning: To treat something in a way that makes it seem more significant, valuable, or important than it actually is.

Example: Students always make such a meal of the simplest test; He made such a meal of that task - it only took him half an hour!

**Make a rod for your own back**

Meaning: To do something that will cause you trouble/problems in the future.

Example: Our management made a rod for their own back when they fired all the highly skilled workers.

**Move heaven and earth**

Meaning: To try as hard as you can to achieve something; to stop at nothing.

Example: I had to move heaven and earth to get my dream job.

**Nip something in the bud**

Meaning: To stop something at an early stage before it becomes a big problem.

Example: It is extremely important to nip this problem in the bud.

### **Nod is as good as a wink**

Meaning: To emphasize that there is no need to explain something further, because the person already understands or knows enough about it.

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: Do you know why Tanya is so upset?

Speaker B: All I know is that she met her ex-boyfriend at the supermarket.

Speaker A: Come on, a nod is as good as a wink. It's all because of him.

### **No holds barred**

Meaning: Without any restrictions or limits.

Example: In my house you can do whatever you want, no holds barred.

### **No picnic**

Meaning: Quite difficult or unpleasant.

Example: College life is no picnic; Being a single parent is no picnic.

### **No prizes for guessing**

Meaning: To emphasize that it is very easy to guess something; something that is very obvious.

Example: No prizes for guessing where John is; No prizes for guessing the answer to that simple question.

### **Not a bed of roses**

Meaning: Having some unpleasant aspects.

Example: My job is not a bed of roses.

### **Not a hair out of place**

Meaning: To have a very neat/tidy appearance.

Example: He was so gorgeous in his new suit, not a hair out of place; She was splendidly dressed, not a hair out of place.

### **Not budge an inch**

Meaning: To refuse to change your mind/position.

Example: I tried to negotiate a better offer but they wouldn't budge an inch.

### **Not have a care in the world**

Meaning: Without worrying about anything.

Example: I miss the old school days, when I didn't have a care in the world.

### **Not have a leg to stand on**

Meaning: To have no proof of your rightness/correctness.

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: What is your evidence?

Speaker B: I don't have a leg to stand on. It's only my word against hers.

### **Not in one's right mind**

Meaning: Mentally ill; cannot think clearly.

Example: Leave her alone, she's not in her right mind; I know he's scared to death, but I need him in his right mind!

**Not best pleased**

Meaning: Annoyed; irritated; angry; unhappy.

Example: I wasn't best pleased when my mother married again; and so soon after my father's death!

**No two ways about it**

Meaning: Definitely; for sure; without a doubt.

Example: If you leave me here alone and go drink beer with your friends, I'll break up with you! No two ways about it!

**Off one's hands**

Meaning: Removed from one's responsibility; no longer needing to be looked after.

Example: If you are unable to complete these tasks, I'll be glad to take them off your hands.

**Off the mark**

Meaning: Not correct; inaccurate; wrong ("on the mark" - correct/right).

Example: Your remark is off the mark; The facts she provided are way off the mark.

**Of the essence**

Meaning: Absolutely necessary in a particular situation.

Example: Speed is of the essence in dealing with an emergency; We must hurry, time is of the essence!

**On a hiding to nothing**

Meaning: Without the slightest chance of success; sure to fail.

Example: He's on a hiding to nothing in this competition.

### **One for the books**

Meaning: Very surprising or unexpected.

Example: His last-minute goal was one for the books.

### **On speaking terms**

Meaning: Amicable or friendly enough to talk (often used in negative form).

Example: I'm not on speaking terms with my family; I don't know how after all his intrigues and betrayals she's somehow still on speaking terms with him; We're on speaking terms with John, but I wouldn't say we're real friends.

### **On the loose**

Meaning: A dangerous animal/criminal who walks free (mostly because they have escaped from prison/cage).

Example: He's still on the loose - but not for long. The police have already blocked all exits from the city.

### **On the verge of something** (or “on the brink of something”)

Meaning: Very close to experiencing something; the moment when something is about to happen.

Example: We are on the verge of a big discovery; We stand on a brink of a great change.

### **On your own head be it**

Meaning: To warn someone that they will have to take full responsibility for what they are about to do.

Example: If you choose to disobey my order, then on your own heads be it!

**Out of sorts**

Meaning: Slightly ill/unwell/unhappy.

Example: He's feeling a bit out of sorts.

**Out of the corner of one's eye**

Meaning: Looking at something indirectly; when you see something briefly, rather than clearly.

Example: Out of the corner of my eye, I saw my wife talking to some stranger.

**Over the hill**

Meaning: No longer young and fit; too old to perform as well as before.

Example: Ron is over the hill as a professional basketball player.

**Pale into insignificance**

Meaning: To appear less important, significant, or impressive when compared with something else.

Example: All my problems pale into insignificance when compared to the problems of the homeless.

**Paragon of virtue**

Meaning: One who has perfect moral values.

Example: Ron was considered to be a paragon of virtue; I don't expect any billionaire to be a paragon of virtue.

**Pass the buck**

Meaning: To shift the responsibility to someone else.



Example: It's your fault because you're in charge, so don't try to pass the buck.

### **Perish the thought**

Meaning: To emphasize that the proposed idea/concept/plan is ridiculous and unlikely to be implemented.

Example: I will never marry her - perish the thought!

### **Pipe dream**

Meaning: Something that is not destined to come true.

Example: His plans to become president of several countries at once are simply pipe dreams.

### **Plain sailing**

Meaning: Without problems; smooth; easy.

Example: Her surgery was plain sailing; Pregnancy wasn't all plain sailing.

### **Play into someone's hands**

Meaning: To do something that will be to your disadvantage and to your opponent's advantage; to act in the way your opponent wants you to act.

Example: It would be playing into Rita's hands to react to her humiliating jokes.

### **Play your cards right**

Meaning: To behave in a way that is beneficial in a given situation; to do something in a well-planned way.

Example: If you play your cards right, you can win this competition.

### **Pull out all the stops**

Meaning: To make every possible effort; do the best you can.

Example: The police pulled out all the stops to find the robber; Dan pulled out all the stops to finish the project on time.

### **Pull someone's leg**

Meaning: To tell someone a lie, as a joke.

Example: Calm down Ian, it's not true, I was only pulling your leg.

### **Pull the plug**

Meaning: To prevent further activity; to prevent something from continuing.

Example: I have enough power to pull the plug on your career; She decided to pull the plug on her research.

### **Put it down to experience**

Meaning: To regard a bad, difficult, or unpleasant situation as a learning experience rather than a punishment.

Example: Everyone makes mistakes, don't worry so much and put it down to experience.

### **Put someone wise to something**

Meaning: To clarify something for someone; to tell someone about something.

Example: I showed up at the appointed time. Tommy put me wise to the situation and we started negotiations.

### **Put something to bed**

Meaning: To successfully deal with something; to finish work on something.

Example: Before putting the agreement to bed, we must clarify a few clauses; Let's just put the issue to bed and stop arguing!

### **Put the cart before the horse**

Meaning: To do something in the wrong order.

Example: Aren't you putting the cart before the horse by choosing a wedding venue before the actual proposal?

### **Raining cats and dogs**

Meaning: Heavy rain.

Example: Better stay at home, it's raining cats and dogs outside.

### **Rain on someone's parade**

Meaning: To do something that ruins someone's plans; dampen one's excitement.

Example: I hate to rain on your parade, but I think your name on the list of finalists is just a typo. You took 25th place, not third, sorry.

### **Ride for a fall**

Meaning: To do something unwise and reckless that will lead to failure or injury.

Example: Nina's riding for a fall with the dubious investments she's been making lately.

### **Rob someone blind**

Meaning: To cheat someone and take their money; to steal everything someone owns.

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: Hello madam! Would you like to multiply your savings? For just a thousand pounds, I can tell you how to do it.

Speaker B: You are trying to rob me blind. I won't buy it!

### **Rocky road**

Meaning: A difficult/challenging period.

Example: The rocky road to the championship.

### **Rub shoulders/elbows with**

Meaning: To spend time with someone.

Example: She loves rubbing shoulders with the rich and famous.

### **Rue the day**

Meaning: To curse or bitterly regret a moment in your life; to be very sorry for something.

Example: I rue the day I lost my wife; When I find him, he'll rue the day he was born!

### **Said the pot to the kettle** (or “the pot calling the kettle black”)

Meaning: A witty remark to someone who says something bad/insulting about another person, when they themselves are guilty of the same thing.

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: He is so arrogant and selfish!

Speaker B: Said the pot to the kettle.

### **Sail close to the wind**

Meaning: To do something dangerous, risky, illegal, or unacceptable.

Example: Illegal tobacco company was sailing close to the wind.

**Salt something away**

Meaning: To save something for later.

Example: Don't worry about the wedding expenses, I have fifty thousand pounds salted away for that.

**Say your piece**

Meaning: To state your opinion; to say what you want to say.

Example: Stop glaring at us! Just say your piece about the incident.

**See fit**

Meaning: To consider proper or desirable.

Example: When you find this fraudster, deal with him however you see fit.

**See the light of day**

Meaning: To come into existence; first time to appear.

Example: This video game first saw the light of day in 2005.

**Serve someone right**

Meaning: To emphasize that someone deserves all the bad things that happen to them.

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: He is in trouble with the law again.

Speaker B: It serves him right!

**Set someone's mind at ease**

Meaning: Help someone to calm down/stop worrying.

Example: He could set her mind at ease by telling her the truth.

**Set something in motion**

Meaning: To start a process/series of events.

Example: By not taking their money, you set the bankruptcy in motion.

**Settle a score**

Meaning: To punish or harm someone for something bad that they did to you in the past; take revenge; pay the debt off.

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: Will you join us to fight the hooligans from 15th Street?

Speaker B: Yes, I have some scores to settle with them.

**Shadow of one's former self**

Meaning: Not as good, powerful, or capable as before.

Example: Three years after her injury, she returned to the basketball court, but was only a shadow of her former self.

**Shed some light**

Meaning: To provide additional/missing information about something.

Example: Hopefully these documents will shed some light on her past.

**Sitting duck**

Meaning: Easy target; someone who is very easy for the enemy to attack.

Example: Without body armor and a helmet, I'm a sitting duck for the enemy; children are often sitting ducks for scammers.

**Sitting pretty**

Meaning: To be in a good, comfortable, privileged, or favored position.

Example: Cariba really is sitting pretty with her new job as CEO; With profits up 200 percent, my company is sitting pretty.

### **Slip of the tongue**

Meaning: Something that was said by accident/mistakenly.

Example: Did I call you Rachel? It must have been a slip of the tongue.

### **Small wonder**

Meaning: Not surprising.

Example: It's small wonder he wanted me back, I'm the best girlfriend on a planet; It's small wonder the kids are bored.

### **Smarten up your act**

Meaning: To improve your behavior; make more of an effort.

Example: Tell your king that he'll have to smarten up his act if he needs me as an ally.

### **Someone's lot in life**

Meaning: General state of life; general situation in life.

Example: John seems happy enough with his lot in life; He tried to accept the bankruptcy of his company as his lot in life, but he could not.

### **Splinter off from something**

Meaning: To separate from the greater part of something; to separate from a larger group.

Example: Small group splintered off from main camp.

### **Squeeze something out of someone**

Meaning: To force someone to do or give something (mostly information).

Example: It's just a shame we couldn't squeeze anything out of Dan and his accomplices. They probably could have told us some interesting things about the robbery!

### **Stand your ground** (or “hold your ground”)

Meaning: To refuse to change your opinion; continue to support a particular position or point of view in an argument; to stay where you are when someone threatens or intimidates you.

Example: Our meeting was unsuccessful because Harry stood his ground and refused to accept any of our offers; The hooligans threatened him, but John stood his ground.

### **Stem the tide**

Meaning: To stop the growth or continuation of something.

Example: These strict measures are designed to stem the tide of illegal immigration.

### **Straight from the horse's mouth**

Meaning: To hear information from someone who knows for sure that it's true (mainly because that person has personally seen or heard something that confirms the accuracy of the information).

Example: Oh, you're here! John already told me what's been happening, but I'd like to hear it straight from the horse's mouth.

### **Strain every nerve**

Meaning: To make every possible effort; do the best you can.

Example: I will strain every nerve to finish the book.

### **Sure as eggs is eggs**



Meaning: Without any doubt; for certain.

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: Are you sure you are pregnant?

Speaker B: Sure as eggs is eggs!

### **Sweep something under the carpet**

Meaning: To deliberately ignore a problem/issue in the hope that it will be overlooked or forgotten.

Example: You can't just sweep your financial problems under the carpet.

### **Sweep the board**

Meaning: To win everything possible.

Example: My team swept the board in the boxing competition.

### **Take a hint**

Meaning: To understand something that is suggested or offered to you indirectly.

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: Nancy, would you like to have dinner with me tonight?

Speaker B: I'd love to, but I have a lot of work to do. And besides, my knee hurts. So, uh...

Speaker A: Okay, I can take a hint.

### **Take it from me**

Meaning: To emphasize that you are absolutely sure of what you are saying.

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: What is your opinion of John?

Speaker B: You can take it from me, he's a wonderful man.

### **Take matters into your own hands**

Meaning: To do something yourself because others have refused or failed.

Example: We failed his order to eliminate the target. So he took matters into his own hands and killed the target.

### **Take something as read**

Meaning: To agree/accept that something is true without any evidence.

Example: We took it as read that he was a spy; Let's take it as a read that he was the first to invent this method.

### **Take the bull by the horns**

Meaning: To confidently deal with a dangerous or difficult situation.

Example: I know that you are a very empathetic person, but it's time to take the bull by the horns and fire inefficient employees.

### **Tall order**

Meaning: A request or task that is extremely difficult to complete.

Example: Completing this task on time was a tall order, but we did it; Spending more time with kids is a tall order for busy parents.

### **Thank your lucky stars**

Meaning: To be extremely grateful.

Example: You should thank your lucky stars that you managed to survive the accident.

### **That's one way of putting it**

Meaning: To emphasize that someone said something completely different from the intended meaning of their words (mostly in a sarcastic or flirty manner).

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: You look really hot!

Speaker B: Well, that's one way of putting it.

### **The jury is still out**

Meaning: To emphasize that something has not yet been decided/answered.

Example: The jury is still out on whether red wine can be good for you.

### **The lion's share**

Meaning: Bigger half; largest part.

Example: I spend the lion's share of my salary on rent.

### **The mists of time/history**

Meaning: To emphasize that something happened so long ago that you barely remember it.

Example: The answer is lost in the mists of time; The origins of this phrase are lost in the mists of history/time.

### **The more the merrier**

Meaning: To emphasize that more people will make the event or activity more enjoyable.

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: Can I bring my brother to your birthday party?

Speaker B: Sure, the more the merrier!

### **There's no telling**

Meaning: Impossible to know for sure.

Example: If he fails in negotiations, there's no telling how many people will lose their jobs.

### **There's no time like the present**

Meaning: To emphasize that now is the best time to do something.

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: When would you like to meet?

Speaker B: There's no time like the present. See you in an hour at our favourite cafe.

### **There's safety in numbers**

Meaning: To emphasize that when you are in a large group with other people, you are less likely to be harmed.

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: We are lost in the woods at night. What should we do?

Speaker B: We must stick together. There's safety in numbers.

### **The worse for wear**

Meaning: Exhausted; tired; in poor condition; beaten up from use.

Example: He was slightly the worse for wear after a grueling workout; Your jacket seems to be the worse for wear - I'll buy you a new one.

### **Throw a spanner in the works**

Meaning: To prevent things from going as planned (mainly by causing problems or difficulties).

Example: I was ready to publish my novel when my little sister threw a spanner in the works by deleting the book from my computer.

**Throw cold water on something**

Meaning: To destroy someone's enthusiasm for something; be extremely pessimistic about someone's plans or ideas.

Example: You're always throwing cold water on my ideas!

**Tie up loose ends**

Meaning: To deal with little issues/problems left unresolved from something; to complete minor matters that are the result of a previous action.

Example: It was almost a perfect heist. With all the witnesses under control, all that remained was to tie up loose ends.

**Till the cows come home**

Meaning: For a long period of time.

Example: You can convince me till the cows come home, but I won't change my mind.

**To someone's liking**

Meaning: Fitting someone's preferences; enjoyable to someone.

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: Everything to your liking, thus far?

Speaker B: Couldn't be better, thank you.

**To the untrained eye/ear**

Meaning: Without special knowledge of the subject.

Example: To the untrained eye, it looks like a stack of old papers. But, believe it or not, this is the original manuscript of my first book.

**Tough act to follow**

Meaning: Someone or something so successful, exemplary, or effective that it overshadows anything that follows.

Example: John was a tough act to follow - a Nobel laureate with 40 years of experience in the field; Finding a replacement for my colleague Dan will be a tough act to follow.

**To your heart's content**

Meaning: As long as you wish; as much as you want.

Example: You can circle Paris to your heart's content; His wife let him eat and drink to his heart's content.

**Treat/handle with kid gloves**

Meaning: To treat someone/something very gently and carefully; be extremely polite and kind.

Example: She needs to be handled with kid gloves; We must treat the situation with kid gloves.

**Trouble is brewing** (or “something is brewing”)

Meaning: A dangerous or difficult situation is developing.

Example: The informant made it clear that something was brewing and that you and your family were in great danger.

**True to form**

Meaning: Behaving in expected or predictable manner; as usual.

Example: True to form, Rita and Sam are late again; True to form, John asked to borrow some more money; True to form, she missed the flight.

**Try your hand at something**

Meaning: To do something for the first time.

Example: I've always wanted to try my hand at scuba diving.

### **Until all hours**

Meaning: Very late; until a very late hour.

Example: We were up talking until all hours.

### **Until the dust settles**

Meaning: Until the situation becomes calmer.

Example: You've caused a lot of trouble, and we'll have to leave town until the dust settles.

### **Walk with a spring in your step**

Meaning: Walk energetically and happily.

Example: As Rita walked into the school that morning, there was a spring in her step.

### **Water under the bridge**

Meaning: Something that happened a long time ago and doesn't bother you anymore.

Example: I forgive you, my dear friend! And that quarrel is just water under the bridge!

### **When push comes to shove**

Meaning: When a situation becomes critical and you need to act; when a decision needs to be made; when something can no longer be ignored.

Example: Only Bella was there to help me when push came to shove.

**With flying colours**

Meaning: Successfully.

Example: He passed his college entrance exam with flying colours.

**With one accord**

Meaning: All together; in full agreement; at the same time.

Example: With one accord they left the room; We made the decision with one accord.

**Without a hitch** (or “with no hitches”)

Meaning: Smoothly, easily, without any difficulties or problems.

Example: The parade went off without a hitch; The knee surgery went without a hitch.

**Worth your while**

Meaning: Something that is worth your attention/time and you can gain some benefit or advantage from it.

Dialogue example:

Speaker A: Is it really worth your while to keep looking for your grandmother's necklace?

Speaker B: Yes, that necklace is a family heirloom.